

Recalls Provo Canyon Snowslides

The Herald 5 July 1983

Time has a way of dimming memories and obliterating facts.

Thus, amid accounts of floods, mudslides and other havoc inflicted by nature across the countryside, we'd like to help preserve the record of two Provo Canyon snowslides that involved three fatalities:

— William W. (Billy) Ferguson, a Scottish convert to the Mormon Church, was killed Feb. 19, 1897 when an avalanche destroyed his home a mile below Vivian Park.

— Don Allred and Mark Hyslop of Provo died at Bridal Veil Falls March 29, 1924 in a massive snowslide that struck while they were helping to remove snow amassed by another slide the previous day. They were part of a 75-man crew brought to the scene by the D&RGW Railroad, whose roadbed was piled high with snow.

For information on the Billy Ferguson story, we're indebted to J. R. (Bob) Gillespie who loaned us a splendid article by Ruth Louise Partridge which his mother, Eva Giles Gillespie, had clipped from the Herald many years ago; and to Ferguson's granddaughter, Elsie Campbell, former Provo City clerk for 18 years, whom we interviewed.

Ferguson loved the wilds —



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Christensen**

Editor Emeritus

and Provo Canyon was plenty wild in those days, especially with its primitive road which was almost impassable in bad weather.

His home, the store goodies which he sold, and the refreshing mountain spring offered a welcome harbor for weary travelers. Billy served meals which he cooked himself. Sometimes he entertained with his guitar or his Scottish dances. And he had extra beds in case folks didn't want to chance the trip to Provo at night.

The avalanche of 1897 may have been "the daddy of them all" — although there have been other devastating slides through the years.

The snow came crashing down from the south side of the canyon. It crossed the river and road with such force that it continued up the mountain to the northwest, then fell back with double fury on Ferguson's home.

Rescue crews found Billy's body still in his bed in the collapsed house. An oil painting of Ferguson and the house and barnyard by artist Joseph Kerby was retrieved from the scene.

Billy was buried Feb. 21, the birthday of his second son, Fredrick. At the time, the three Ferguson children — William W. Jr., Fredrick, and Lilly May (Clayton) — were living with their mother, Sarah Bird Ferguson, in the family's Provo home.

A tip from our long-time Herald colleague, Bailey A. Lindstrom motivated our research in old newspaper files on the back-to-back snowslides of 1924 which resulted in the deaths of Allred and Hyslop.

The first slide had come down from the north side of the canyon March 28. On Saturday, March 29, the large crew was clearing away the snow when the second avalanche thundered

down from the cliffs above Bridal Veil.

Guards on watch saw the slide coming and fired their guns. With this warning, 30 men scrambled to safety. Forty-five others were swept by the snow and debris. All dug out or were rescued except the two. Hyslop's body was found April 1; Allred's four or five days later.

An interesting sidelight of the first slide was the miraculous escape of J. E. Carter, flume foreman for Utah Power and Light Co. The onrushing wind in front of the snow carried or rolled him 300 yards to a point at one side where he was found unconscious. "The powerful wind seized me as if I were a feather and turned me around as rapidly as it would have turned a leaf," Carter was quoted as saying.

It's been 59 years since the double snowslide of 1924. Only some members of the caught in the second slide still living. We'd be pleased to hear from any of them.

And if any readers know of persons other than Ferguson, Allred and Hyslop who have been killed in Provo Canyon snowslides, you can help preserve a bit of history by making the facts known.

Delta Green's Memory of

Billy Ferguson's Spring was popular
he lived there in a little frame
house & one winter a snow slide
at the bend in the road
came down from the south side
of the canyon & missed him &
on its way back down, it
covered his place & killed him.
The water from the spring is
still on the left side of the going
north. He was short & very happy

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Billy Ferguson

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November 8, 1983

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